



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 26 February 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
26 FEBRUARY 1968

1. South Vietnam

Enemy activity has dropped to its lowest level since the Tet offensive began on 30 January. The threat to a number of urban areas continues, however.

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2. Laos

Communist forces are maintaining pressure in the southern panhandle. The towns of Attapeu and Saravane were attacked yesterday after two days of heavy pressure on their outposts. The regional commander considers Attapeu untenable and intends to withdraw if the situation worsens.

3. Japan

Ambassador Johnson notes, "from bits and pieces" recently picked up, that both Sato and Foreign Minister Miki are privately showing deep concern about US prospects in Vietnam. Sato, realizing that US failure in Vietnam would destroy him politically, appears to be wondering whether he should try to disengage himself. Miki, a prospective successor who wants to carve out a political position for himself, is likely to be even more standoffish than Sato.

The ambassador believes both men will wait to see how the wind blows--and trim their sails if necessary--before again publicly associating themselves with the US position in Vietnam.

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4. Panama

Both Robles and Arias have backed off from their collision course, and the threat of major violence has diminished. The National Guard, still on full alert, ought to be able to quell any political arguments among pre-Lenten carnival-goers.

5. Paraguay

Our embassy has it from a good source that President Stroessner, during his late March visit to Washington, may offer to send a Paraguayan battalion to Vietnam. Stroessner would probably hope for some goodies in return. Other Latin American leaders, many of whom have a low regard for Stroessner, would not be impressed.

6. Czechoslovakia

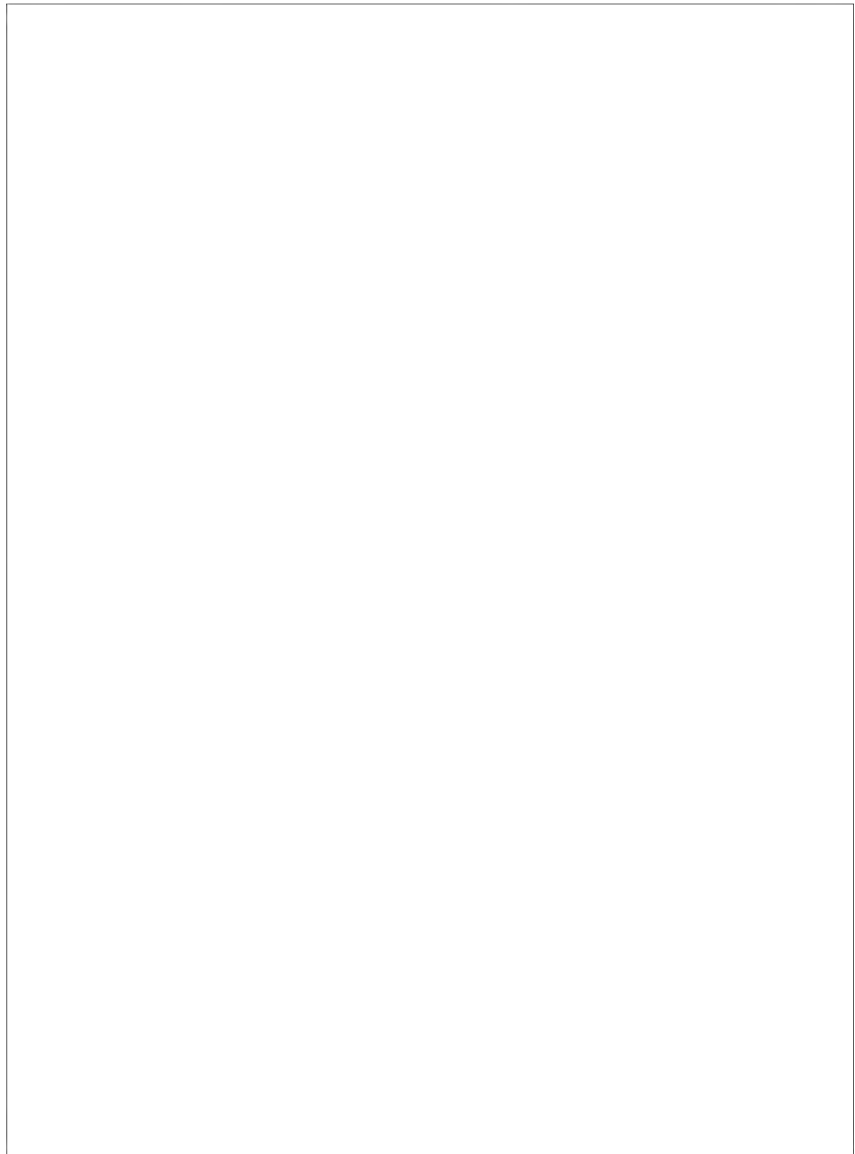
Party conservatives, possibly led by ex-boss Novotny, are attacking Dubcek's "liberalizing" program on grounds that it dilutes the power of the party too much. A real struggle on this issue is shaping up, with the possibility that neither the liberals nor the hardliners can win a clear-cut victory at the mid-March Central Committee meeting.

7. Bahamas

The US consul general has been privately tipped off that Premier Pindling will announce today his decision to call general elections. The voting, which will then have to be set for sometime in late March or early April, will surely strengthen Pindling's hand, both at home and in his determined efforts to get the British to give the colony more self-rule.

8. Communist China

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

More US Prisoners to be Released?: Last Saturday, Ambassador Sullivan met the North Vietnamese chargé in Laos for the first time since the release of the three American fliers. The chargé, affable and willing to talk, was pleased to hear that the released pilots were considered to be in good shape and had indicated they were treated satisfactorily because, he said, it is Hanoi's policy to treat prisoners well. The chargé then said, "You have already received three prisoners. There are two others" At this point, the "[redacted] British information officer rolled up," and the chargé never finished this tantalizing sentence. Ambassador Sullivan will see the chargé again to try to find out what he was about to say.

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Views of Ex-French Correspondent in Hanoi:

Bernard Cabanes, on his way back to Paris last week from his lengthy tour in Hanoi, talked with an officer of our embassy in Vientiane. Cabanes, who impressed the officer as an intelligent and reflective observer (and obviously sympathetic to North Vietnam), made the following points:

--Hanoi is not counting on the US elections to lead to a short-term end to the war favorable to North Vietnam, and the population has been given no such promises;

--The North Vietnamese had hoped the recently released US pilots would return to the US via commercial air, but were "disappointed rather than surprised" that they chose to go on a US military plane;

--The release of these prisoners, Cabanes thought, was a "genuine gesture of good will" at a moment when it seemed that such a sign "might cover a little of the distance on the road to negotiations";

--He believes, on the basis of his experience with the temper of the North Vietnamese people, that they "will be the winners."

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Comments of Czech Ambassador to Hanoi: A Czech journalist has told our embassy in Prague of a recent conversation with the Czech ambassador to Hanoi while the ambassador was in Prague on home leave.

According to the journalist, the ambassador has the impression that Moscow's influence in Hanoi is growing at Chinese expense. The ambassador also believes Hanoi's offensive in South Vietnam was directed at improving its position in anticipation of negotiations sometime this summer. On the Pueblo affair, the ambassador was quoted as having said that this action was closely coordinated with Hanoi, and that the North Koreans were "playing a very dangerous game." There is no firm evidence that Hanoi and Pyongyang acted in concert regarding the Pueblo, although the timing of the incident has fostered considerable speculation to this effect.

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French Communists to Hanoi: The French Press Agency on Saturday broadcast an announcement that a delegation of the French Communist Party would leave for Hanoi today. The delegation will include members of the party's top policy body and at least one member of the Central Committee.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Nothing of significance to report.

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